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Forschungsbericht Römische Religion: Orient (2003-2008)

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The years covering the period from 2003 until 2008 represent a gold mine for the study of religious life in the Roman Near East. First mention must go to LIGHTFOOT 2003, not just a superb commentary on *On the Syrian Goddess* (the Herodotean-style ‘spoof’ attributed to Lucian – she has now established beyond reasonable doubt that the treatise is a perfect imitation of the literary style of the Father of History), but simultaneously an in-depth study of Levantine religion, which discusses the literary account against the background of corroborative and other comparative evidence from a variety of sources. She has also just published a long article on another important, but much neglected, text from the region, the Syriac *Oration of Melito*: LIGHTFOOT 2007. The past years have seen a number of overviews on the Roman Near East which, naturally, all deal in some detail with the relatively dominant evidence for temples and cult practices in the region. A most stimulating introduction to the religious world can now be found in BUTCHER 2003 (ch.9), and for a very accessible overview see also SARTRE 2005 (ch.10). SOMMER 2005 focuses on Palmyra, Edessa, Dura-Europos and Hatra, arguing for an emphasis on the similarities in societal structures of these sites on Rome’s ‘Steppengrenze’, and the same author published a well illustrated general introduction to the region: SOMMER 2006. MILLAR 2006 is the third and final instalment of the important collection of his articles, with this volume containing the *Vorstudien* to his *The Roman Near East* from 1993 and the papers which subsequently sprang from it. FREYBERGER, HENNING and VON HESBERG 2003 contain the proceedings of a colloquium held in Cologne in early 2000, including papers on religious aspects in Palmyra, Commagene, the Limestone Massif and especially the Hauran. I cannot help mentioning KAIZER 2008, a collection of papers from a seminar series held in Oxford in 2004 on the variety of local religious life in the classical Near East, including A. LICHTENBERGER on the Decapolis, L. DIRVEN on Hatra, J. ALIQUOT on Mt Hermon, and perhaps most importantly M. GAIFMAN on ‘the aniconic image of the Roman Near East’, an article that challenges our perceptions of the role of non-anthropomorphic sculpture in the region’s worship by arguing that the traditional binary model of aniconic vs iconic objects of worship does not cover cultic realities, despite that model’s active presence already in ancient discourses. STEINSAPIR 2005, based on landscape studies, is the first attempt to focus on the Near Eastern rural cults per se. The booklet by HVIDBERG-HANSEN 2007 follows the ubiquitous duo rider gods, known under various indigenous names and usually interpreted as the Near Eastern version of the Dioscuri, through both the Roman and the pre-Roman Near East.

As usual, many works deal with religious life in specific towns or regions of the Roman Near East. LICHTENBERGER 2003 provides the first ever overview of religious life in the cities of the Syrian Decapolis as a whole. His excellent study, based above all on the numismatic evidence, argues amongst other things for a Phoenician origin of many of the cults (for a more detailed reaction, see KAIZER 2004a and KAIZER 2004b). RIEDL 2003, a doctoral dissertation on the very same subject, is available on-line. BARKAY 2003 deals with the coinage of Nysa-Scythopolis, dominated since the earliest issues by Dionsysos. Her study shows how in the second half of the second century AD a new ‘visual programme’ was introduced, which for the first time directly connected the mythological world of the

god with the local foundation legends. KENNEDY 2007 does not actually focus on religion, but his exploration of landscape and settlement patterns with regard to the Decapolis puts forward methodological and archaeological models useful for the Roman Near East as a whole. In July 2008 ARAM organised another conference on the Decapolis (following the one in 1992, with proceedings in *Aram* 4 (1992)), which will also be published as a volume of *Aram*. Annual reports of the excavations at Hippos-Sussita are speedily published by the Haifa team led by A. SEGAL (for details, see <http://hippos.haifa.ac.il>). The location of Dion seems finally to have been settled, as being the site of Tell al-Ashari, by KROPP 2006.

As regards the Hauran region in southern Syria, whose religious life was last studied as a whole by SOURDEL 1952, the second band, in two volumes, of the DENTZERS' Hauran project focuses on the temple complex at Si'a: DENTZER e.a. 2003. The proceedings of an IFPO colloquium on 'Cultures du Hauran: déterminismes géographiques et communautés humaines', held at Damascus in October 2007, have recently been published (*non vidi*). Further westwards, ALIQUOT's PhD on religious life in the Lebanon, Antilebanon and Hermon regions is about to appear in the *BAH* series as ALIQUOT forthcoming, and for the inscriptions from Mt Hermon see already ALIQUOT 2008. In the north of Syria, the hometown sanctuary of Jupiter Dolichenus at Dülük, just north of Gaziantep in present-day Turkey, is being explored by a mission from Münster led by E. WINTER, with some findings presented to a wider public in the guide by WINTER and BLÖMER 2006. For the kingdom of Commagene as a whole, including important sections on the royal cult of the megalomaniac Antiochus I, see the excellent FACELLA 2006 (esp. cap.7), and the epigraphic study by CROWTHER and FACELLA 2003. Extensive reports of a new Dutch mission to Nemrud Dag can be found in MOORMAN and VERSLUYS 2002, MOORMAN and VERSLUYS 2003, and MOORMAN and VERSLUYS 2005. A study of religious life of Commagene is forthcoming by M.J. VERSLUYS.

The main contribution over these years to the study of the religious life of Palmyra is the publication of the text volume on the temple of Nebu by BOUNNI 2004 to accompany the volume of plates, BOUNNI, SEIGNE and SALIBY 1992, which was not distributed until 2004. A collection of papers in memory of the Palmyrene epigrapher D.R. HILLERS was published by CUSSINI 2005. FINLAYSON 1998, a PhD on the funerary reliefs of Palmyrene women and their clan associations, is presently prepared for publication. As regards the Euphrates fortress of Dura-Europos, the fifth volume of *Dura-Europos Études*, covering the years 1994-1997 of the French-Syrian mission headed by P. LERICHE, is now available as LERICHE, GELIN and DANDRAU 2005. A sixth volume is forthcoming. BERTOLINO 2004 brings together the Aramaic inscriptions from the site, and DOWNEY 2003 is a splendid publication of the often ignored terracotta figurines and plaques from Dura-Europos, showing among other things the town's cultural proximity to Mesopotamia. Though not technically part of the official series of Dura-Europos Final Reports, it complements her previous books on the Heracles sculpture (from 1969) and on the stone and plaster sculpture (from 1977). The thesis by REEVES 2005, available via UMI microform, proposes a radical re-interpretation of the famous military calendar from the site. Papers by myself on the religious life of Dura can be found in COTTON e.a. (2009) and BONNET, PIRENNE-DELFORGE and PRAET 2009, for both of which see below. In December 2008 I organised a colloquium in Durham on 'Religion, Society and Culture at Dura-Europos', proceedings of which are now in preparation. Hatra, in the north-Mesopotamian Jazirah, received a volume of *Antike Welt* by SOMMER 2003, and a dossier of articles in *Topoi* 10 (2000) [2003], including an overview of the city's

religious life by myself. BERTOLINO 2008 is a useful handbook on Hatrean epigraphy (although the inscriptions are still in need of a proper re-edition that would also be accessible for ancient historians). L. DIRVEN is finishing a catalogue of all Hatrene sculpture, and she is also organising a colloquium in Amsterdam in December 2009. Edessa, the fourth of the cities covered by M. SOMMER's above-mentioned book on the 'Steppengrenze' (Sommer 2005), is the subject of a new collection of essays: TUBACH, RAMMELT and GREISIGER 2009. In the south of the Near East, the Nabataean lands continue to be the subject of a large variety of publications, many of them beautifully illustrated for a wider audience. Amongst the scholarly output on religious culture, NETZER 2003 deals with architecture, REID 2005 with a small sanctuary for the imperial cult in the centre of Petra, and the supersized ZAYADINE, LARCHÉ and DENTZER-FEYDY 2003 on the nearby Qasr al-Bint. KÜHN 2005 compares Nabataean 'Totengedenken' with those known from the Old Testament, and POLITIS 2007 contains relevant chapters on religion by J.R. BARTLETT and art by J. PATRICH.

The unique frescos from the mithraeum at Hawarte are now published with splendid colour photographs by GAWLIKOWSKI 2007 (for the miscellaneous evidence for other mithraea in the Near East see the lengthy dossier on 'Mithra au Proche-Orient' in *Topoi* 11 (2001) [2004], p.35-281). The complete works of Mithraism's greatest scholar, FRANZ CUMONT, are in the process of being re-published and re-edited in the *Bibliotheca Cumontiana*, a project consisting of *Scripta Maiora*, *Scripta Minora* and *Scripta Inedita*, headed by C. BONNET and inaugurated with CUMONT 2006. BONNET, PIRENNE-DELFORGE and PRAET 2009 contains proceedings of a 2006 conference on 'Oriental religions 100 years after Cumont', and BONGARD-LEVINE e.a. 2007 publishes the remaining 164 letters between CUMONT and MIKHAÏL ROSTOVITZEFF, which are of particular interest for the study of Dura-Europos.

ELIAV, FRIEDLAND and HERBERT 2008, which will now be discussed in some detail, is a massive (XXVII + pp.769) volume of proceedings from a conference at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and the Toledo Museum of Art (Ohio) in November 2004. Although 'religion' is notably absent even from the book's subtitle (*Reflections on Culture, Ideology, and Power*), a book entitled *The Sculptural Environment of the Roman Near East* is unavoidably going to be of key importance to the study of religious life in the region. The volume contains twenty-eight papers divided over six parts, not all of which can be covered here in equal measure. As the editors state in their introduction, such "investigation of Roman sculpture from multiple perspectives" (1) is quite innovative. And the book's particular geographical focus - which allows it to be discussed in the present context - shifts the emphasis away from the more common Graeco-Roman material. G. BOWERSOCK opens part I ('Encompassing Hellenism: the dynamics of extended cultures') with a two and a half page 'reconsideration' of Near Eastern Hellenism, making the point that in the *Roman* (as opposed to the Late Antique) Near East, Greek had not yet become "the unifying culture of the region" (23). This is followed by M. SARTRE's long piece on 'the nature of Syrian Hellenism', in which he sets out "to pin down what [Syrian Hellenism] really was, how the Syrians themselves viewed it" (27). Describing the variety of interactions between classical and indigenous phenomena, he brilliantly discusses the "parallel cultures" in Roman Palmyra as resulting in "a sort of perfectly controlled schizophrenia" (42), and concludes that Greek culture in the Roman Near East "remains a criterion of social differentiation whose prestige seems virtually untarnished" (49). This thought-provoking piece should be compulsory reading for all future students of the field. Considering both the relative wealth of material from Roman Palestine to illuminate the role statues played in the world touched by

‘Hellenism’, and Judaism’s special place within this debate, it is only fair that Part I finishes with a piece by A. OPPENHEIMER on ‘the Jews in the Roman world’, in which the strength of Jewish identity that allowed “a degree of openness to the culture that surrounded it” (66) is set against the diminishing worries about the perceived diminishing attractiveness of the pagan cults. The papers in part II deal with sculptures’ ‘Origin, Production, and Fate’, in the words of the editors the more “practical and physical realms of statues” (5). G. FOERSTER surveys the marble sculpture, whose importation into the Near Eastern lands “understandably corresponds with the flourishing of the Hellenized urban centers in the Antonine and Severan periods” (79). P. ROCKWELL, from a sculptor’s perspective, analyses ‘working methods’ in the well-known studio at Carian Aphrodisias. Turning to Palestine, Y. TSAFRIR discusses ‘the fate of freestanding sculptures in Late Antiquity’, with a splendid example of the “ambivalence” (121) in attitudes in the form of an altar from his own excavations at Nysa-Scythopolis dedicated to the city’s founder Dionysus, dated AD 141/2, which was preserved in Late Antiquity, but with the sacrificial top of the altar erased: “by doing this, they avoided any cultic connotation while preserving the aesthetic object and the classical heritage” (120). Destruction of statuary is discussed in the papers by F.R. TROMBLEY and by J. POLLINI. Part III is about ‘Two-dimensional Landscapes: Re-presenting Statues in Other Media’, and contains papers by E.M. MOORMANN on frescos (mostly not from the Near East, of course, with the exception of the famous mural from Dura-Europos depicting the sacrifice of the military tribune Julius Terentius); by F. MILLAR on mosaics (“a contrasting art form that exhibits comparable features of conflict, coexistence, or coalescence between classical and nonclassical styles and, as regards accompanying texts, a parallel interplay between Greek and various Semitic languages” (256); S. HERBERT on Hellenistic seal impressions from Tel Kedesh in the Galilee; and W. ECK on inscriptions from Roman Judaea, focussing on the epigraphic material from Caesarea Maritima, thus mostly in Latin. Considering the lack of sculpture that is “incontrovertibly” Jewish or Christian, MILLAR’s point that “it is within the sphere of two-dimensional representative art ... that a three-way comparison among the artistic expression of paganism, Christianity, and Judaism is possible” is highly pertinent. Part IV, ‘Engaging the Realm of the Gods’ is of course the most relevant section of the volume from this review’s perspective. It opens with P. STEWART’s paper on ‘Baetyls as statues’, which now needs to be considered alongside the above-mentioned paper by GAIFMAN in KAIZER 2008. He draws attention to the “irony” that the bizarre and exotic aniconic imagery finds itself the subject of a “reinvention of baetyl cults in newly prominent urban cult centers”, as known through second-century coins, and forms as such “really part of the culture of the Roman Empire” (312). E.A. FRIEDLAND takes Athena/Allat as a case study of how different worshippers could visualise their divine world in different modes. Her survey of the sculptural representations of this goddess (the appendix at 343-50 lists sixty-three pieces altogether from Palestine, Arabia and Syria) aims to throw light on the multifarious ways in which Greek culture and imperial power could be reacted to. F. ZAYADINE presents the sculptures discovered in recent years in and near the exedra of Petra’s Qasr al-Bint temple, showing how this monument functioned in honour of the Antonine house and comparing it with the exedra at Shahba-Philippopolis. The brilliant contribution by T.M. WEBER then discusses the little known statue remains from four minor and often ignored sanctuaries, illuminating our knowledge of religious life in rural areas by showing how classical themes could find reflection in various indigenous sculptural traditions. M. GAWLIKOWSKI revisits the famous Athena

statue from the temple of Allat at Palmyra, which his own team discovered many years ago, but which he now argues belonged to the temple's final, post-Zenobia phase, when the building was incorporated in the Camp of Diocletian. The classical statue itself is believed to have stood elsewhere in Palmyra beforehand, and it is hence argued that "the sculptural environment in the Temple of Allat at Palmyra was definitely local in character from its beginnings to the last quarter of the third century C.E." (411). S.B. DOWNEY's overview of the evidence for statues at Dura-Europos "reinforces the idea that such three-dimensional cult statues, as opposed to paintings or reliefs, were largely foreign to religious practices and worship" (435) in the Euphrates stronghold. This part of the book is concluded with an essay by E. PERRY on Libanius' dealings with cult statues in times more and more dominated by an aggressive Christianity. Part V deals with sculptures in the context of 'Urban Landscapes and Perceptions'. R. VAN DAM looks from different angles at the destruction of imperial statues during the notorious 'riot at Antioch in 387'; M.L. FISCHER's paper on the sculpture from Ascalon's basilica forms a case-study of the Near Eastern marble trade; the chapters by R. GERSHT and K.G. HOLM deal with Caesarea Maritima, and that by Z. WEISS with the civic centres in the Galilee. Part VI, finally, contains four papers on 'Social, Political, and Religious Discourses'. B. ISAAC warns against modern inclinations to view certain images as 'symbols, allegories, personifications', and argues that these images "are used to express mythological, not abstract concepts" (577). Y.Z. ELIAV focusses on the Jewish and Christian discourses on the (possible, but ultimately uncertain) presence of pagan statues in the ruins of the Temple at Jerusalem; R. KALMIN re-evaluates rabbinic attitudes to idolatry; and D. FRANKFURTER looks at 'Christian memory and response' in relation to images from Egyptian religion. This splendid volume succeeds well in its aim to examine the varying roles of statues from a multi-disciplinary perspective, and ought to be consulted by all students and scholars interested in the religious life of the Roman Near East.

With regard to inscriptions and language-issues, as well as other, non-textual sources, I have to be very selective. The programme 'Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie' has made further progress since 2003 (for the latest developments, see http://www.hisoma.mom.fr/Programme_epigraphie/JB_YON/IGLS_intro.html).

Outside the *IGLS* series, and in fact part of the *Inschriften Griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien*, is CANALI DE ROSSI 2004's 'repertorio' of inscriptions from the Far East, including Armenia, Mesopotamia, Persia and Arabia. Dealing with the epigraphy from the 'Silk Road' is GARDNER, LIEU and PARRY 2005. There is an excellent section on the interaction between Latin and the Aramaic dialects of the Roman Near East in the monumental ADAMS 2003, and COTTON e.a. 2009 is a collection of essays on cultural and linguistic developments in the region. As regards visual sources, BOWERSOCK 2006 is a brief introduction to Near Eastern mosaics in general, and BECKER and KONDOLEON 2005 deals with those of Syria's capital Antioch, including a catalogue of the Worcester Art Museum Antioch Collection. In the field of numismatics, BUTCHER 2004 studies the coinage of Northern Syria, and the same author has also published coins found in Beirut in *Berytus* 45-46 (2001-02) [2003]. Part of the *Roman Provincial Coinage* project is now also available on-line (<http://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/>). I have not yet seen WEBER with AL-MOHAMMED 2006, which brings together sculptures from the Roman Near East in the National Museum at Damascus. Finally, I may mention two splendid conferences on religious life in the Roman Near East, one organised by E. WINTER, M. FACELLA and M. BLÖMER at Münster (19-21 April 2007) on 'Lokale Identitäten im Römischen Nahen Osten -

Konzepte und Deutungsmuster’, the other organised by R. RAJA at Aarhus (18-21 September 2008) on ‘Contextualising the sacred in the Hellenistic and Roman Near East: religious identities in local, regional and imperial settings’, both of which with proceedings in progress. Rests me to say that, alongside the traditional key journals on the field, such as *Syria*, the Lyon-based *Topoi. Orient-Occident*, now in its fifteenth issue - with a Supplement series to accompany it, of which nine volumes have thus far appeared - has now firmly established its position amongst the elite (<http://www.topoi.mom.fr/>).

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